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Art Needlework.

OLD ECCLESIASTICAL EMBROIDERIES.

THE recent loan exhibition at the School of Needlework, South Kensington, included carpets, curtains, coverings of Jewish scrolls of the Law, copes, chasubles, and priests' vestments brought together from all parts of Europe. These glittered with gold and silver thread, pearls, and other precious stones, and displayed embroidery that for excellence of workmanship, beauty of color, and gorgeous effect could hardly be excelled. The needlework shown dated chiefly from the twelfth century to the sixteenth, although there were some earlier specimens. Even as far back as A.D. 700 the Popes Adrian and Innocent sent to England for embroidery to adorn St. Peter's at Rome. Among the early specimens of English work the Sion cope, worked in 1250, and the cope of St. Dunstan in Durham Cathedral are considered the finest extant. Much was ruthlessly destroyed by the zeal of the early reformers in the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI., and still more fell a prey to covetous hands, which destroyed rich vestments for the gold thread they contained, or sewed them together and used them for curtains and carpets. Such was the fate of work that had taken more than a lifetime to accomplish, for ladies of the olden times frequently labored at an altar-cloth for many years, and left it to be reverently finished by other hands, believing that work dedicated to God's service could not engage too much time or thought.

Much of the embroidery exhibited at South Kensington was taken from the national collection or lent by city companies, but a large quantity came from Stoneyhurst College, Blackburn, from St. George Cathedral, Southwark, and other Roman Catholic institutions. Besides these there were valuable contributions from noblemen's and gentlemen's houses. The individual history and the vicissitudes of many of the vestments would form a curious study. Thus there was a cope of Florentine tissue and crimson velvet made at Florence for Henry VII. and ornamented with red and white roses and other royal badges. This is mentioned in the king's will as a bequest to the Abbey of Westminster; it disappeared from the Abbey at the time of the general pillage of religious houses, and was lost for a century, finally being found at an English college at St. Omer and sent from there to England in 1790, when the French Revolution endangered its safety. It now belongs to Stoneyhurst College. A set of superb priestly vestments in which to celebrate High Mass was also exhibited. These were made in the reign of Henry VII. for Whalley Abbey, Lancashire, and were concealed for many years at Towneley Hall, the seat of the Towneley family. Other vestments have been stolen from churches in Holland during the wars of independence. Some have lain hidden behind wainscots for many years, others deposited in secret chambers the existence of which had been forgotten, and only discovered on the demolition of the houses that contained them; in fact, a romance could be written by collecting together the singular perils and escapes these ancient embroideries have gone through.

Some very beautiful palls, chiefly sent by the city companies, deserved special notice, not only for their own worth, but as pointing out to modern undertakers that anciently it was not considered necessary to wrap the departed round with trappings of gloom, but rather in costly stuffs and handsome needlework to brighten the passage to the grave, and to lead the mourners to look beyond the actual sadness to the brightness which the spirit had entered. The state pall belonging to the Fishmongers' Company, which was used in the reign of Richard II. for Sir William Walworth, is embroidered at head and foot with a picture of Saint Peter holding the keys of office, while angels on each side scatter incense over him. The angels' wings are composed of peacocks' feathers in

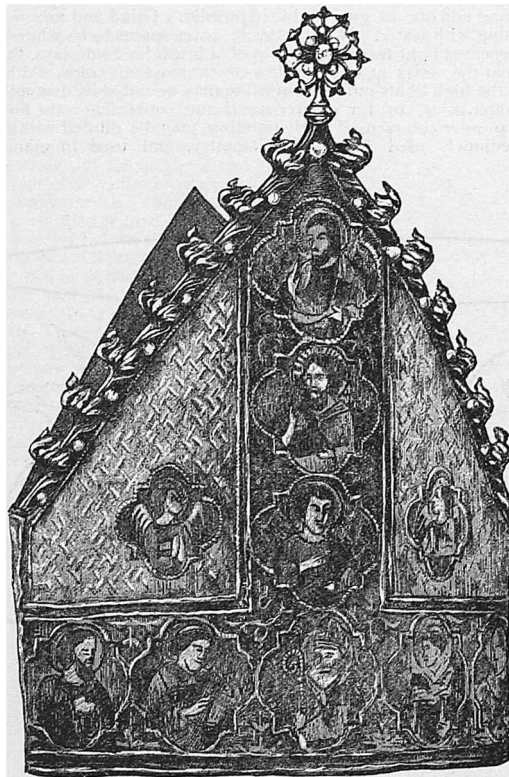
their natural colors; their outer robes are gold raised with crimson, and their faces are worked in the cele-

ful pall of red velvet and cloth of gold tissue belonging to the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Virgin as Queen of Heaven is the chief device, while figures of St. John the Baptist and other saints and the arms of the company fill in the sides.

Many mantles for the scrolls of the Law were exhibited, having been lent by Jewish synagogues. These are literally covered with the richest raised bullion embroidery and fine silk work. Among the miscellaneous specimens there was a tiny picture worked upon a piece of writing paper, both sides alike, that was an example of needlework to all. It was about three inches long by two wide, and besides containing the centre figure of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, showed the brook Cedron, a distant landscape and houses, the instruments of the Passion, and His Crown of Martyrdom.

The stitches used in ancient ecclesiastical embroideries are couchings or layings of gold thread caught down by colored silks; stitches arranged in patterns; raised couchings or gold threads raised by means of waddings and thus forming designs; crewel satin, chain, tapestry, and tent stitches; the celebrated opus plumarium, or stitch worked to imitate the feathers of a bird; and the opus Anglicanum or split stitch, claimed by Anglo-Saxon ladies as their own invention, and used by them in all their fine work, and particularly about the faces and hands of saints. This stitch resembles chain-stitch, and is worked so that it follows the lines of features and the contours of flesh, and thus gives shadow and relief to a perfectly flat surface worked in one shade of silk. It is made by working a short satin stitch and bringing the needle up for the next stitch through the centre of the first, thus dividing or splitting the silk threads. To further enhance the beauty of this stitch it was the custom to heat round brass knobs and to press these down upon the work wherever deep shadows threw it back, this process bringing into greater relief the parts upon which high lights were required.

BLANCHE C. SAWARD.



GERMAN EMBROIDERED FIFTEENTH CENTURY MITRE.

brated opus Anglicanum stitch. Various other designs adorn the sides of the pall alternated with the arms of the company, the supporters of which—the



BACK OF A CHASUBLE.

FLEMISH EMBROIDERY OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

merman and mermaid—are beautifully worked, the merman in golden armor, the mermaid in white with long hair. The Ironmongers' Company sent a beauti-

A CHAIR-BACK of tambour-worked pongee has a trail of yellow roses with dull green foliage worked in split silk upon one end. A striking novelty for chair-backs and for the mantel hanging of a boudoir is a strip of guipure d'art over crimson satin, the lace being richly overwrought with flowers in colored silks. A band of écreu hand-made lace is wrought with tracteries of gold thread, and is laid over maize satin for the border of a small drawing-room table.

A NOVEL use of embroidery and plush is found at the Woman's Exchange in a pedestal on which stands a basket of flowers. The pedestal has the top, base, and upper and lower parts of the shaft covered with red silk plush. In the centre is a band of black wrought in irregular zigzags of gold with flowers and foliage in silk embroidery.

LADIES who prefer to dust their own costly bric-à-brac rather than to trust it to careless, inappreciative hands, have small bellows, which are as luxurious as brass, leather, plush, and embroidery can make them. The colors chosen are usually red and blue—both antique tints. Gold lines radiate from the narrow to the wider ends, and flowers in silk embroidery, outlined with gold, are strewn at intervals. These are always of a different tint. If the plush is blue the flowers are red, and vice versa.

THE old splint straight-backed rocking-chair has undergone a sort of apotheosis in linen, crash, paint, and embroidery. Large-leaved pumpkin vines and flowers are the ornament. The drawing is carefully done, and the forms outlined in green and yellow. The tint and shading are then put in with thin washes of paint, and the final touches are added in green and yellow ribbons at the corners and at the top.